

Serial No.: 09/923,250
Conf. No.: 9145

- 2 -

Art Unit: 2854

In the Claims

Please replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application with the following list of claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A system for air embossing a surface of an embossable fabric comprising:
 - a cylindrical stencil having an inside surface and a fabric-facing surface;
 - an air lance comprising a conduit and at least one nozzle, wherein the nozzle is configured and positioned with respect to the inside surface of the stencil so that it is able to emit a stream of a gas supplied to the air lance such that the gas is directed to pass through openings in the stencil and, when the system is in operation, impinge upon the surface of the embossable fabric, the stream of gas having sufficient velocity and collimation to create visible embossed depressions in the surface of the fabric in a pattern corresponding to a pattern of the openings in the stencil, and wherein the nozzle is positioned so that a minimum distance separating the nozzle from an inner surface of the stencil is less than a minimum distance separating the nozzle from a longitudinal central axis of the conduit; and
 - at least one stencil stabilizer constructed and positioned to apply a force to the stencil during operation of the system ~~sufficient~~ to reduce variations in a distance separating the embossable surface of the fabric and a portion of the fabric-facing surface of the stencil directly adjacent thereto during rotation of the stencil, wherein the stabilizer is constructed and positioned so that at least a portion of the stencil stabilizer is separated from the longitudinal central axis of the conduit by a minimum distance exceeding the minimum distance separating the nozzle from the longitudinal central axis of the conduit.
2. (Original) The system of claim 1, wherein the at least one stencil stabilizer is constructed and positioned to apply a force to the stencil during operation of the system that is sufficient to essentially eliminate variations in a distance separating the embossable surface of the fabric and a portion of the fabric-facing surface of the stencil directly adjacent thereto during rotation of the stencil.

Serial No.: 09/923,250
Conf. No.: 9145

- 3 -

Art Unit: 2854

3. (Original) The system of claim 1, wherein the at least one stencil stabilizer is constructed and positioned so that at least a portion thereof is in contact with a surface of the stencil.
4. (Original) The system of claim 3, wherein the at least one stencil stabilizer is constructed and positioned so that at least a portion thereof is in essentially continuous contact with a surface of the stencil during the entirety of its rotation.
5. (Original) The system of claim 3, wherein the force applied to the stencil by the at least one stencil stabilizer is sufficient to create a tension in the stencil.
6. (Original) The system of claim 5, wherein the force applied to the stencil by the at least one stencil stabilizer is sufficient to distort the shape of the stencil during a least a portion of the rotation of the stencil.
7. (Original) The system of claim 3, wherein at least a portion of the stencil stabilizer contacts an inner surface of the stencil.
8. (Canceled)
9. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 1, wherein no portion of the stencil stabilizer intercepts the stream of gas emitted from the nozzle during rotation of the stencil.
10. (Original) The system of claim 9, wherein the stencil stabilizer does not rotate during rotation of the stencil.
11. (Original) The system of claim 10, wherein the stencil stabilizer is connected to the air lance.
12. (Original) The system of claim 11, wherein the stencil stabilizer comprises at least a portion of a nozzle forming component of the air lance.

Serial No.: 09/923,250
Conf. No.: 9145

- 4 -

Art Unit: 2854

13. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 11, wherein at least a portion of the stencil stabilizer is positioned at a zero separation distance in contact with the inner surface of the stencil and wherein a distance separating the nozzle from the inner surface of the stencil ~~is equal to or~~ exceeds the zero separation distance.
14. (Original) The system of claim 13, wherein the distance separating the nozzle from the inner surface of the stencil is adjustable.
15. (Original) The system of claim 14, wherein the level of force applied to the inner surface of the stencil is inversely proportional to the distance separating the nozzle from the inner surface of the stencil.
16. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 11, wherein at least a portion of the stencil stabilizer contacts the inner surface of the stencil at a location that is upstream of the nozzle.
17. (Original) The system of claim 16, wherein the system includes at least two stencil stabilizers.
18. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 17, wherein at least a portion of a first stencil stabilizer contacts the inner surface of the stencil at a location that is upstream of the nozzle and wherein at least a portion of a second stencil stabilizer contacts the inner surface of the stencil at location that is downstream of the nozzle.
19. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 1, wherein a maximum first distance separating the embossable surface of the fabric from a portion of the fabric facing surface of the stencil directly adjacent thereto, without the force applied to the stencil by the stencil stabilizer, exceeds a maximum second distance separating the embossable surface of the fabric from the portion of the fabric facing surface of the stencil directly adjacent thereto when the system is configured for operation with the force applied to the stencil by the stencil stabilizer.

Serial No.: 09/923,250
Conf. No.: 9145

- 5 -

Art Unit: 2854

20. (Original) The system of claim 19, wherein the first distance exceeds the second distance by at least about 0.001 inch.
21. (Original) The system of claim 20, wherein the first distance exceeds the second distance by at least about 0.005 inch.
22. (Original) The system of claim 21, wherein the first distance exceeds the second distance by at least about 0.01 inch.
23. (Original) The system of claim 22, wherein the first distance exceeds the second distance by at least about 0.05 inch.
24. (Original) The system of claim 23, wherein the first distance exceeds the second distance by at least about 0.1 inch.
25. – 29. (Cancelled)
30. (Previously Presented) An air lance for directing a gas through a rotating stencil and onto a surface of an embossable fabric for air embossing the fabric comprising:
a conduit having at least one inlet opening therein;
at least one orifice, in fluid communication with the conduit, forming at least one nozzle, the nozzle being constructed and positioned to direct a stream of the gas through the stencil and onto the embossable surface of the fabric and the nozzle being positioned so that a minimum distance separating the nozzle from an inner surface of the stencil is less than a minimum distance separating the nozzle from a longitudinal central axis of the conduit, when the air lance is in operation; and
at least one stencil stabilizer connected to and extending from the conduit, the stabilizer being constructed and positioned to contact an inner surface of the stencil during operation of the system, said contact creating a force on the inner surface that is sufficient to reduce variations in a distance separating the embossable surface of the fabric and a portion of a fabric-facing surface of the stencil directly adjacent thereto during rotation of the stencil, the stabilizer being further

Serial No.: 09/923,250
Conf. No.: 9145

- 6 -

Art Unit: 2854

constructed and positioned so that at least a portion of the stencil stabilizer that extends farthest away from the conduit, is separated from the longitudinal central axis of the conduit by a minimum distance exceeding the minimum distance separating the nozzle from the longitudinal central axis of the conduit.

31. (Original) The air lance of claim 30, wherein the at least one stabilizer is constructed and positioned to contact the inner surface of the stencil during operation of the system, said contact creating a force on the inner surface that is sufficient to essentially eliminate variations in a distance separating the embossable surface of the fabric and a portion of the fabric-facing surface of the stencil directly adjacent thereto during rotation of the stencil.

32. (Original) The air lance of claim 30, wherein the stencil stabilizer comprises at least a portion of a nozzle forming component of the air lance, the nozzle forming component including the at least one orifice forming the at least one nozzle therein.

33. (Previously Presented) The air lance of claim 32, wherein the nozzle forming component comprises a first separable component and a second separable component, with the first and second separable components being mounted on opposite sides of an outlet opening disposed in the conduit such that they are positioned adjacent to and separated from each other on the conduit so that the distance between adjacent facing surfaces of the first and second separable components defines a slit forming the nozzle.

34. (Original) The air lance of claim 33, wherein the stencil stabilizer comprises at least a portion of the first separable component and wherein a maximum distance separating the first separable component from the longitudinal central axis of the conduit exceeds a maximum distance separating the second separable component from the longitudinal central axis of the conduit.

35. (Original) The air lance of claim 34, wherein the first separable component is mounted on a side of the outlet opening that is upstream of the nozzle when the air lance is in operation.

Serial No.: 09/923,250
Conf. No.: 9145

- 7 -

Art Unit: 2854

36. (Original) The air lance of claim 30, wherein a distance separating at least a portion of the at least one stencil stabilizer from the longitudinal central axis of the conduit is adjustable, when the stabilizer is positioned in contact with the inner surface of the stencil.

37. – 45. (Cancelled)

46. (Currently Amended) A system for air embossing a surface of an embossable fabric comprising:

- a cylindrical stencil having an inside surface and a fabric-facing surface;
- an air lance comprising at least one nozzle and connectable in fluid communication with a source of a gas and disposed within the cylindrical stencil, when the system is in operation; and
- at least one stencil stabilizer constructed and positioned to apply a force to one or more discrete locations on the inside surface of the stencil during operation of the system so as to distort the cross-sectional shape of the stencil into a non-circular shape and to maintain said non-circular shape during rotation of the stencil to thereby reduce variations in a distance separating the embossable surface of the fabric and a portion of the fabric-facing surface of the stencil directly adjacent thereto during rotation of the stencil.

47. (Currently Amended) A system for air embossing a surface of an embossable fabric comprising:

- a cylindrical stencil having an inside surface and a fabric-facing surface;
- an air lance comprising at least one nozzle and connectable in fluid communication with a source of a gas and disposed within the cylindrical stencil, when the system is in operation; and
- at least one stencil stabilizer constructed and positioned to apply a force to the stencil during operation of the system ~~sufficient~~ to reduce variations in a distance separating the embossable surface of the fabric and a portion of the fabric-facing surface of the stencil directly adjacent thereto during rotation of the stencil;

wherein the at least one stencil stabilizer is constructed and positioned so that at least a portion thereof is in essentially continuous contact with one or more discrete locations on the inside surface of a surface of the stencil during the entirety of its rotation.

Serial No.: 09/923,250
Conf. No.: 9145

- 8 -

Art Unit: 2854

48, - 49. (Cancelled)